FOR

METHODIST

UNIFICATION

JOHN CARROLL

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A HUMBLE OVERTURE

FOR

METHODIST UNIFICATION

IN THE

DOMINION OF CANADA.

BY

JOHN CARROLL.

"A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle."—PROVERBS xviii. 19.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE dead-lock now existing to the further progress of unification among the Methodists of Canada, appears to be on the principle of "one is afraid, and the other dare not." Men of office have their good standing with their respective denominations to preserve, and they are afraid of committing the body to something which their backers will not approve. In which case, if some un-official man would propound a plan, which would embrace the concessions to be on all sides, in mere outline, it would be something to start from. This proposal few will be willing to make, for fear of losing prestige or something else.

Now, I have neither office nor prestige to lose; and feeling a profound interest in Canada Methodism, with the central body of which I have stood associated for more than fifty years,—eschewing the invitations of three successive generations of disruptionists. The present *brochure* will be considered venturesome by my friends, but I cheerfully take the venture. I have reason to know that former proposals did good to the cause of unity, though perhaps not to myself.

In the modifications of our own system proposed, I am sure I have the majority of members and ministers on my side, if they are not over-awed by the rigid conservatives, whose tenacity supply the place of numbers. But I implore them to consider the case with an enlightened consideration of all the circumstances, and to beware lest they prevent at this crisis the accomplishment of unification for ever. Some may think that my disapproval of some pet theories are rather bluntly expressed, but I think by this time they ought to be convinced that I am neither partial nor unkind.

I have mentioned several things as matters of personal preference, which may be relegated to the category of minor details, and accepted or not as in no wise vital to the general character of the scheme. Many things in the organization when first launched would doubtless be modified in the process of legislation from four years to four years.

Inviting the prayers of all the friends of unity, "that we all may be one," I remain, with love to all concerned,

THE AUTHOR.

A HUMBLE OVERTURE, &c.

METHODIST DIVISIONS A DISGRACE AND A CAUSE OF FEEBLENESS.

THE many divisions in Methodism are nothing to its credit, showing that those who bear the name have set too little store by unity, which they have so often severed for very trifling considerations. If this pettish tendency to interrupt communion on trivial grounds marked the infancy of our denomination, it is time that we had "put away childish things," in this particular; and that we now cultivate the dignity of denominational manhood. If we do not, we shall find ourselves outstripped by a sister denomination, which has recently composed the differences between almost as many sections of Presbyterianism as there are of Methodism

NONE OF OUR ORIGINAL PRINCIPLES CONFLICT WITH COMPROMISE.

Looking back on the original testimony and character of Methodism, which all sections of it profess to revere, there is really no principle involved that need keep us apart. Methodism was not the result of declaring for or against Church establishments, for it pronounced an establishment from the first, "a merely human institution;" it did not declare for or against Presbyterialism, or Episcopacy, for its Presbyterial section in England holds fraternal relations with its Presbyterio-Episcopal Sister in the United States, and its ordinations and ministerial *status* are reciprocally regarded as on a par. *Connexionalism*, however, is a characteristic of Methodism under every name and aspect which its many sections have assumed, or preserved.

There are only three features essential to Methodism, and these three have been retained by all: namely, its *peculiar doctrines*, or its *manner* of emphasizing the doctrine of assurance, or the witness of the Spirit, and the possibility of "perfecting" of that "holiness," "without which no man shall see God;" certain *prudential means of grace of a social character*, such as the class and fellowship meeting, and the lovefeast; and the *itinerancy*, or the *united*, *rotating*, *itinerant pastorate*, including a central appointing power. Methodism is a *revival* —it means *conversion:* and the preaching of the above-mentioned doctrines, and the maintenance of a ministry detached from local ties, and the frequent assembling together above referred to, are necessary to conserve that revival and to promote conversions, or to the "spread of scriptural holiness over the land." If these essentials are preserved, other things may be modified according to circumstances; for it has been a principle in Methodism from the first, that no exact system of Church order is taught in the New Testament.

THE CHANGES PROPOSED ARE NO "CONCESSION."

To adopt a useful feature by one section from another, or in forming a union with another, cannot be called a "concession." And, after

the experience of eighty-five years in Canada, and the experiments which have been tried, I believe we could compile a better system of Methodism than is exemplified in any one section of it now upon earth, a system which would give all reasonable consideration to the laity, combined with efficiency to the administration of the pastorate; and a system which would give all reasonable liberty to local courts, in all matters not infringing on connexional authority and unity, and yet would provide for a thorough central authority and supervision, which the exigencies and energy of a Connexion require.

LAY RIGHTS.

With these general principles laid down, I come to the details of their application. As to the *first* of these, a proper consideration to the laity, they should share in all the counsels of the Church, excepting what refers strictly to the work which is peculiarly a minister's, and to the character of ministers, which, so long as the laity are tried by a jury of their own peers, should be canvassed by ministers alone, not prohibiting charges to be preferred by laymen, of course. Personally, I do not attach so much importance to this particular as some, for I would be quite as willing to be tried by laymen as ministers, in expectation of quite as just or lenient a verdict; but the majority of all the ministers in all the older branches of Methodism do not feel as I do, and regard this point as vital. And it would be unjust and unreasonable to wrest the prerogative from them, so long as they continue to exercise it with the fidelity they have done in the past, especially as they only, in contradistinction from the laity, are subject to an annual examination of character. If all the lay-members of District Meetings and Conferences had the following questions asked about themselves, there would be some reason in making the inquiry reciprocal: namely, "Is there any thing against his moral and religious character? Does he believe our doctrines, and obey our discipline, especially in the matter of reading the Scriptures, maintaining family and private prayer, observing the Lord's Supper, and fasting or abstinence? Has he been punctual in attending all the society meetings, especially prayer and class-meetings? Is he equitable in all his business transactions?"

LAYMEN IN THE DISTRICT MEETINGS AND ANNUAL CONFERENCES.

But this one matter of character conceded, I think it is very unwise in the ministry, whether it be to further unify the body or not, to withstand the claim of a seat to laymen in the District Meeting and the Annual Conference, which is only the District Meeting on a larger scale, on all the questions propounded, [as to the District Meeting] from question "FIFTH," page 40 of the Discipline of the M. C. OF CANADA, to the end, on page 49, except such as may be construed to relate to the character and qualifications of ministers; and, [as to the Annnal Conferences] all from question 3rd, Discipline, page 32, to question 19, on the following page, excepting questions 12, 13, and 14. I do not stop to argue the propriety of this, as it is a necessary concession from the largest body in order to the adhesion of nearly all the others; and I know of no reason from Scripture, or practical utility, against the lay participation indicated.

When I hear any such reasons urged, it will be time enough to answer them, which, I presume to say, will be no very difficult task. With these qualifications, I would most readily concur in the manifesto of the Primitive Methodist Conference, that "there shall be an equal number of Laymen to Ministers in all our Church courts."

But I do not think it would be wise or well to allow "all business meetings to elect their own chairmen." If it be simply some committee for a temporary object, that would follow of course; or if it were a connexional one and the disciplinary chairman unable to attend; but for District Meetings, Quarterly Official Meetings, Leaders and Stewards' Meetings, and Trustee Meetings, to be able to set aside the Chairman or Superintendent, is to empower them to sin against connexional unity, and to carry a district or circuit out of the body which it is the very design of connexionalism to prevent. Such an act is as much disrespectful to the *laymen* in the court above, which appointed the presiding officer, as it is to the *clergymen* in that body.

CHAIRMEN OF CHURCH BOARDS TO BE MINISTERS.

As to *secular* men being eligible to preside in Conferences, whether Annual or General, it is simply ridiculous. Can you expect a man to handle the deliberations of an ecclesiastical body and to decide questions of Church order, the bent of whose mind has been to the "study of things carnal and secular," in preference to one who has spent years in familiar intercourse with such matters? As well might you depute one of these clerics to go and conduct the commercial transactions of that secular candidate. Again, is it seemly that a gentleman, whose business posters are at that moment on the fence, should be presiding over the deliberations of a grave ecclesiastical body? Would it not shock the sense of propriety of ten thousand, where it would gratify the whim of one? It cannot be hoped that this will ever be conceded. I believe I would go farther than almost any other of the oldest body for organic unity, but I would never concur in that. It is suicidal to the Church itself, to wish to deprive ministers from performing the very functions for which they have been trained and are qualified.

NOMINATIONS IN THE QUARTERLY OFFICIAL MEETINGS.

As to "Circuit Quarterly Meetings nominating their own officials," I am free to admit that leading influences in the older Methodist bodies have pushed the claim of pastoral nomination so far and with a tenacity that has rather impaired pastoral influence, while it was hoped to add to pastoral authority. But then, both the clergy and the laity of the Church should be represented in these official appointments. And this is the ground for pastoral nomination: its advocates say, not without show of propriety, "I *nominate*, you *elect*." By this mutual veto on each other, they must be forced to accord in the end. It will not do to say, "The ministers may *vote* in the Quarterly or Circuit Meeting as well as the lay officials;" yes, but being outnumbered ten to one, they are sure to be out-voted. I think the principle of this joint action, or mutual veto, is correct, but we have unfortunately reversed the Scriptural order: the Apostles said (Acts vi. 3,) "*Look ye out* among you honest men, of good report, and

full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom *we may appoint.*" Our Discipline should first fix the standard of qualification, then let the laity choose men corresponding with this description, and let the pastorate have the right of finally authorizing, or vetoing, if they have cause to believe an individual unworthy; but, of course, at the same time being responsible as they are in all other respects to the judiciary of the Church.

I hold some peculiar opinions myself about the powers of these local or circuit courts, and the way they have exercised their powers in times past. Let the stickler for lay-suffrage remember that those quarterly meeting elections are no election by the general laity of the Church, but is the election of lay-officials of one another—the doing of a close corporation, answerable to no one, but often over-topping the ministry and rank and file of the Church at the same moment. Talk of priestly tyranny; I have seen more intolerable tyranny enacted by a few local courts that I could particularize than all the ministers I ever knew. I believe the true analogy would be, let the whole society elect the Stewards who handle their money once a year, and no Society "Representatives" would be needed; let the pastor appoint the Leaders, with the concurrence of their several classes; and let these, with the local preachers, exhorters, S. School Superintendents, and Representatives of Trustee Boards, as at the present appointed, constitute the Quarterly Official Meeting. The Stewards would represent the financial interests of the membership, and the Leaders would be at once the sharers of the ministers' pastoral work and authority, and yet the representatives of their several classes as well.

METHOD FOR CALLING AN ARBITRARY CHAIRMAN TO ACCOUNT.

I think that what the demanders for electing the chairmen of Church-meetings seek to prevent is the right of a clerical chairman to refuse putting a vote, or his adjourning a meeting at his own will. There is no doubt that some tyrannical things have been done by arbitrary men, (and all the enactments in the world will not prevent some men being arbitrary when they get into office—it is their nature) especially when goaded on by dangerous and turbulent levellers. These two extremes create all the trouble; but their conduct on both sides works the cure of the mischief: people get weary of it and put it down. Now this power of a chairman complained of is practically possessed by the chairmen of all bodies; but both theirs and ours are amenable for their acts, and they ought to be. If a chairman of a meeting sees that a resolution is unconstitutional, he should refuse to put it; but if his ruling is reported to be in conflict with the rights of the laity, there should be a court for trying the question, in which the laity should compose a moiety of the members. If a chairman refuse to put a motion which conflicts with connexional authority and unity, he deserves respect and commendation; but if he does it barely out of stupid adherence to his own preferences in matters unessential, he deserves to be arraigned and deprived of his office.

CONCESSIONS TO THE EPISCOPALS.

The preferences and wishes of the Episcopal type of Methodism deserve to be considered in a plan for unification, and the introduction of some of its characteristics would be not a concession merely, but real elements of strength, energy, and usefulness.

THE EPISCOPAL OFFICE.

First, then, as to the Episcopal office itself: The change in the original Canada Conference from a permanent Episcopacy to that of an annual Presidency arose from no dissatisfaction with the Episcopacy, but on the principle of compromise for peace sake, the same which is now being urged. All that remain of the ministers and members who were connected with the Church before 1832, have no prejudice, but pleasant memories of that form of Methodism. It is true, there is a large infusion in the present "Methodist Church of Canada" who either came from non-Episcopal Methodist bodies in England since 1832, or were brought into the Church during this period, and all of those bodies of that type in this country, contracting parties to the Union, can not be expected to have any proclivities for Episcopacy, and may even have prejudices against it, whose preferences will require concession. Besides, the views of the Eastern Conferences deserve to be considered, which have not been trained in notions at all leading to Episcopacy. Yet even these, I would venture to say, if they went to reside in the neighboring republic, would feel no scruples in uniting with the prominent Methodist body in that country because of its Episcopacy.

GENERAL SUPERINTENDENTS.

But even supposing our Episcopal friends will have to surrender something for union in that particular, the essentials of Episcopacy may be preserved and a real element of good secured. The very short experiment in the newly-united body of a President of General Conference, without any general supervision of an authoritative kind, should have convinced us that the contrivance is an anomily and an instance of connexional weakness and incompleteness. A General Superintendency, presiding in the Annual Conferences, would give a homogeneity, a unity, and an energy to the united body, which we need not expect to have in our present disjointed mode of operation. But the General Superintendency may be secured without the form of a separate ordination, or a life-long incumbency of office. An election from General Conference to General Conference, or for the space of four years, provided successful administrators were eligible to re-election, would secure all the benefits of oversight, without the danger of confounding an *office* with an *order*. You could keep the efficient, or get rid of the inefficient, which you cannot do with a life-long Episcopacy. If our Episcopal brethren will yield the consecration, which is absurd in a mere presbyterial overseer, we shall be able, I hope, to secure the General Superintendency in the united body.

A MODIFIED PRESIDING ELDERSHIP.

If we have travelling General Overseers, we may get rid of the expense of Presiding Elders, or travelling Chairmen—unless in the case of missionary ground, where I would have the Annual Conferences empowered to relieve the chairmen of districts from the care of particular charges, and to instruct them to travel constantly throughout their respective districts; in which case, they might be called Presiding Elders,—indeed, in either case, in my humble opinion, it is a more expressive name than chairman.

THE DIACONATE, OR HALF-ORDINATION.

The restoration of the diaconate, or the giving of a probationer the half-ordination, empowering him to baptize and marry, and to assist the elder at the sacrament, at the end of two years well endured probation, with a seat in the Annual Conference, would, while it would seem like a concession to our Episcopal brethren, be a valuable administrative arrangement in itself, for which I could furnish something like Wesleyan precedents and many reasons for its probable usefulness.

A MERE OUTLINE.

Now all these proposals could be amplified, illustrated and argued or defended at much greater length, if I did not think that a mere outline exhibition of my plan, besides being simplest, is best at this stage of proceedings. When I find any part to be misunderstood or challenged, it will be time enough to explain or defend.

COMPROMISES ABOUT EQUAL.

According to the scheme which I have sketched above there would be concession and compromise about equally exercised on all sides : the present Methodist Church of Canada would be conceding lay-co-operation to a much greater extent than now in the District Meeting, and the same in the Annual Conference in lieu of its present mixed-committee system ; the Primitive Methodists would be giving up one-half of their lay-delegates ; and all those bodies which have full lay-delegation at present would be surrendering several things to pastoral authority and ministerial prerogative which ministers do not enjoy among them now. I do not say anything about our Episcopal brethren surrendering the matter of lay-delegation in the Annual as well as General Conference, for they have it under consideration ; but our brethren of the Evangelical Association, if they came into the measure, would be surrendering that which they have not yet conceded to the laity—a representation in Conference ; and the Episcopal Methodists would be surrendering their Bishops, proper, for General Superintendents, elected for a term of four years ; and they would be giving up their travelling Presiding Elders, unless in rare cases, as a temporary expedient for supervising the newer parts of the work, more likely to be supplied with a younger and less experienced ministry. The diaconate, perhaps, might not be much cared for one way or another on any side ; but all the other bodies besides themselves would be adopting what they have not been much—or lately—used to, a General Supervision instead of an Annual and Local Presidency.

*** If any considerable number of Methodists in any locality, upon the perusal of it, approve of this scheme, let them call an unofficial meeting and express their approval. This might be done in sections, by those of the several bodies apart ; or done by a mass meeting of all sorts of Methodists together. This will give impetus to the union movement, and show the state of public opinion.


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